



Trinity College

HARTFORD CONNECTICUT

March 22, 2012

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing with regard to Bill 5546 that addresses juveniles with very long sentences having their cases looked at, at another interval, a second time. I am totally in support of such a bill.

I have been a Professor of Theater and Dance at Trinity College for 40 years and Founder and Executive/Artistic Director of the Judy Dworin Performance Project for 23 years. I have been leading education and arts intervention programs at York Correctional Institution for the past seven years. Several of the women that I work with in the arts engagement workshops that I lead were sentenced at a very young age and have been at York for many years already. These women have evolved significantly from the time they committed the crime for which they are now serving time. I see such growth and, not to overstate it, transformation occurs in these young women. They are seeking whatever avenues available to improve themselves—taking advantage of the arts and educational offerings and making tremendous progress. They are smart, talented, and show such great potential. And yet some of them face 10, 20 and even 30 more years of prison time.

It seems to be not only prudent but critical to re-examine the cases of these women (and men) at an interval that might allow a reconsideration of their status. Perhaps on a re-examination, the benefits of the extensive sentences that they face might be seen in a different light. And perhaps not. But at least there would be an opportunity to assess this before a 14- or 15-year-old has lived 50 years behind bars.

Before I began my work at York, I might not have had this opinion. I, like so many, did not give those in prison much thought. But my work at York has afforded me the kind of insight that I wish were available to more of us. These are human beings, subject to grave errors and also subject to change. The choices of young people, many of whom have led battered lives, exposed to the streets, sexual and physical abuse, drug addicted parents and family members, and more, can be wrong-headed and damaging, but whether the punishments that have been assigned are appropriate is another matter. I urge those in a position to decide to allow this bill and its opportunity for a second look to move forward and afford youthful offenders with extensive sentences the possibility of living a larger part of their lives outside of the confines of prison walls.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Judy Dworin

Professor, Theater and Dance, Trinity College

Executive/Artistic Director, Judy Dworin Performance Project

DEPARTMENT OF THEATER & DANCE

300 SUMMIT STREET, HARTFORD, CT 06106-3100
TEL (860) 297-5122 FAX (860) 297-5380 www.trincoll.edu